



Children and Family Services (CFS)

Youth Get Prom Opportunity

HS Connection Staff

With an assortment of prom dress and tuxedo choices, the warmth radiating from a curling iron and a swipe of a makeup brush, nearly 80 registered foster youth had the opportunity to experience the memories of prom.

The 2015 Prom Extravaganza, hosted by San Bernardino County's Independent Living Program (ILP), began the morning with preparation for the main event to help the youth get a full experience of prom.

One ILP Prom Extravaganza event was held March 21 for the Western, Eastern and Central regions, while a second prom event was held March 28 for the North Desert region.



While the Children's Fund in San Bernardino collected prom dresses and tuxedos to be distributed among the youth, students from Marinello Schools of Beauty volunteered their time to apply makeup for the girls and provide hair services for the girls and boys. The CFS staff taught prom etiquette to the youths attending the event.

Alicia Washington, Peer and Family Advocate with San Bernardino County Children and Family Services, said the ILP Prom Extravaganza is life changing for the foster youth who participate in the event.

"This event is so important for our girls, especially in building their self-esteem," Washington said.

"Many of them struggle day-to-day especially being in foster care, but this is our opportunity to come and actually enjoy time with our other foster youth, enjoy time with picking dresses and with makeup."

Washington said the ILP Prom Extravaganza provides girls with a day of feeling glamorous. "They definitely get to try different things, new styles, new color of hair, makeup and nail polish," Washington said. "When we see them enjoying the experience of the event, we definitely know its life changing for them."

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With the prom event as one of Washington's favorite events, she said it is also an opportunity to spend time with youth and to hear about what is happening in their lives.

"Normally, we're doing our day-to-day work and preparing for all of the events," Washington said. "So, this is time we get to spend shopping around and looking for dresses. We get some time to talk to them about things that they are going through and even provide extra support, mentoring for them, being an ear for them to discuss some of the things they are going through."

Christopher Ponce Sr., student at Marinello Schools of Beauty, said he volunteered his time by providing haircuts because he said he believed it was a chance for him to give back.

"This school changed my life so if I can help someone else and just make them look good with a fresh haircut, then that's what I want to do."

Magali, ILP foster youth, said she tends to be shy at first but meeting new people was her favorite part of the event.

"Being girly every now and then is really fun to do especially when you're with your friends having fun," Magali said. "I would recommend this for any incoming foster (youth) that are coming because it's really amazing. It's an amazing experience that there are people who want to help us to have a good time."

Evelin Melendez, student at Marinello Schools of Beauty, offered her help in applying makeup for the girls. She said she felt it would be a great opportunity to do something nice for other people.

"I have a couple friends that were foster kids and I have known what they go through," Melendez said. "I thought it would be nice to do something for them."

Isela, ILP foster youth, said she felt good to have her hair and makeup done in preparation for the event.

"It was fun to look at a variety of dresses because it was fun trying them and experiencing picking out a dress for prom," Isela said. "Because I am short, I picked out a short tan dress. I

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like it, I like the way it fits on me, and it's really cute.”

CFS provides family-centered programs and services designed to ensure safety, permanence, and well-being for San Bernardino County's children, while strengthening and attempting to preserve the family unit. CFS helps prevent further harm to children from intentional physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, exploitation, or neglect by a person responsible for a child's health or welfare.

CFS is doing its part to help the community achieve the Countywide Vision by ensuring residents have the resources they need to provide the necessities of life to their families. Information on the Countywide Vision can be found at www.sbcounty.gov.